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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor’s Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Ahhh, what a great week! Spring is definitely here, with an occasional glimpse of summer thrown in. Trees are budding, plants and flowers are poking through the soil, grass is growing, daylight is lasting longer, and the birds are all over. It doesn’t get much better than that. I’m going to let it go at that for this week - no sense ruining the moment!

Until next time...

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ARAnyM 0.9.0 Released

Petr Stehlik has announced:

A new version of ARAnyM is available now for GNU/Linux, Mac OS X and MS Windows. With full 68040 MMU support it is now more than suitable for developing not only user but also system software (yes, FreeMiNT and Linux/m68k are running happily on ARAnyM).

URL: http://aranym.atari.org

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, shall we try this again? The past couple of weeks have been quite unsatisfactory as far as getting this

column "to press" is concerned. I THINK I know where the problem is now, and we'll see if I am correct. I guess that, if you're reading this, things are back to normal. <grin>

Anyway, now that we've got this mysterious bug squashed, we can settle down and get back to normal.

I'm going to touch a bit on one of my pet peeves... stupid people. On my way to work, there's a coffee shop... you know the one... they sell donuts too. Anyway, this coffee shop is on a busy road. When driving to work in the morning, there's almost always someone stopped dead in the right lane (this is a busy four lane road) waiting to turn into the coffee shop's drive-thru lane. Now, I'm one of the biggest coffee lovers out there (just ask the guys who show up for our weekly Atari chat), but even I wouldn't stop dead in the middle of a lane to wait to turn into a coffeeshop parking lot.

This happens at least several times a week. I'm accustomed to it. What I'm NOT accustomed to is people coming from the opposite direction, turning INTO my lane and stopping there, again, to wait to get into the coffee shop's drive-thru lane.

Now, if that's not bad enough, this future president of The Einstein Society decided to make this turn and sudden stop when I was no more than a dozen yards away. If I hadn't been accustomed to people doing stupid things in this particular area, I would have "T-boned" them for sure.

Which leads me to one of my favorite stances on motor vehicle licensing... Forget about driving tests! Give IQ tests! Smart people can FIGURE OUT how to drive!

Well, let's get to the news, hints, tips and info available from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Mark Earwood asks about a program to test his Falcons:

"I'm looking for a program called SCSITEST. It's mentioned on the Czuba tech website and in the CT1 instructions. I have a couple of Falcons I want to check out, and I understand this program will test the SCSI bus and drive(s) and maybe the bus-fix situation.

I've been in touch with Rodolphe Czuba and he no longer has it. Can anyone tell me where to find it?"

Matthieu Barreteau tells Mark:

"Here it is : http://www.barreteau.org/atari/ct1rev3b/testscsi.zip"

Mark replies:

"Thank you very much for finding that. I was looking for scsitest, I should have tried it the other way round!"

Matthieu tells Mark:

"If you (or other) want the complete original CT1 package, you can grab this file : http://www.barreteau.org/atari/ct1rev3b.zip "

Last week we talked a little bit about CompactFlash 'hard drives' and using them as silent, solid-state storage devices for STs. This week, 'Simon' asks about availability:

"Very interesting thread. I also enjoy the silent Atari ST, and the noisy SCSI drive bores me...

Do you have an idea where a SCSI compactflash card reader could be sold today? I've made a (quick I admit) search on Google and found nothing..."

Joseph Place tells Simon:

"There were (are?) some made by Microtech that I know others are using with success at least with a Hades. I have tried their triple card reader with no success, and haven't been able to get it to work. I understand that the PCD-25BH has been used with success (the dual PCMCIA model). I'm still looking for one of those. I think I will find that it may work with my Falcon (true SCSI) but I don't think this is going to work on an ST without a Link '97. I have a Link II, and I understand that it does not implement all of the needed SCSI specifications. The triple card reader that I have shows up on my Falcon, but it says the media is write protected when I try to partition with HDDriver. The triple card reader seems readily available most the time on eBay."

Hallvard Tangeraas tells Joseph:

"But it may work *with* a Link 97 then?
The key word being *might* perhaps.....
I don't feel much like forking out the cash, time and effort trying to get hold of the needed hardware only to find out that it won't work after all.

I bought my Link 97 second-hand, so I'm missing the specs. But I bought it because people at the time told me that it would be compatible with "everything". That's a few years back now, so I would be interested in finding the exact specs for this host-adapter.

Are there any other Link 97 owners out there who has a manual or whatever? Hopefully it'll work with current SCSI devices as well.

I don't have a Falcon myself, but since it's at least recognized there must be some way of working it out.

I've been continuing my web-searches, and although I haven't found much in regards to SCSI compactflash card-readers, there are some useful hits:

- Microtech PCD-47B (triple card internal SCSI reader)

Yup, like you said, available at ebay. I found one which is currently at US$ 0.99 (5 days left)

- Kodak SCSI compactflash card reader
I found this at Amazon for US$ 49.95, but have no idea if it's suitable or not.

- Microtech PCD-40 (portable SCSI card-reader).
This one is expensive, going for between US$ 170 and 200. One place to find it is at Amazon.

-Microtech DPAI (Digital Photo Album Internal -dual slot card reader) which is, according to this website:
http://www.bright.net/~gfabasic/html/about_me.htm
just a different name for the PCD-25BH which you mentioned, which people have had success with.

Hey, hold on!!!!!! Upon reading a bit more in detail, this page belongs to Lonny Pursell -an Atari user, and he lists those devices connected to a Hades and a TT, but since he's also got regular hard drives in those machines I doubt he's using the compactflash cards as hard drives, but I may be wrong of course.

So.... the conclusion so far is that the dual-slot reader from Microtech is hard to find and expensive when found. But who knows, searching in used computer hardware forums, garage sales, swap meets or whatever might yield better results.

Another idea springs to mind.... seeing how cheap USB card-readers are (typically around US$ 20-30 if I recall correctly), what if there were USB to SCSI converters around (that aren't too expensive)?!
I've found a converter which goes the other way round, from Microtech again (http://www.qbik.ch/usb/devices/showdev.php?id=195), but that really doesn't help us.

OK, I've done my fair share of investigating -perhaps someone else has some new input on the subject."

Lonny Pursell adds:

"I have used compact flash cards in my card readers. It' simply a matter of an adapter, which I bought and tested. Works fine. I use several PCMCIA cards (no adapter needed) on a regular basis. Tested smartmedia and compact flash with adapters. Was going to test the sony memory sticks, but they wanted to much for that adapter, so I didn't bother with that one."

Hallvard asks Lonny:

"So they all worked fine as "hard drives" then?
You were able to boot from them without any problems and use them just as any regular hard drive?

On my system I'm not going to have a normal hard drive at all if this works, as I need a *silent* system, which is the reason I'm looking into this in the first place.

I didn't realize that other types of cards could be used as well as

there’s only been talk of CompactFlash cards. Price and performance-wise, are CompactFlash cards the best alternative for hard disk replacements (i.e. daily use, lots of reading/writing of data)? I’m thinking that either a 512 Mbyte or 1 Gbyte card will do."

Lonny replies:

"Correct. Occasionally a media change would go unnoticed, but that is not a problem if you are going to always leave the disk in. With Thing Desktop, I just press shift-escape, which forces a media change.

I don’t know the pros/cons of the various cards. But I did read smart media is not so good for long term, also they don’t go beyond 128mb far as I know. You can use many types of media so long as there is an adapter for it. Most of the cards have pcmcia adapters these days. I bought all pcmcia cards to avoid the adapters. I have one huge 880mb pcmcia card I use, which by the way follows the same rules as any other HD, I have to use MiNT to access it since it’s partition to one big 880mb disk."

Hallvard now asks about outfitting a MegaSTE with IDE drives:

"Does anyone know if there are any IDE interfaces available for the Mega STe at the moment?

I know of several do-it-yourself (DIY) IDE interfaces for the ST/STF/STFM computers, using the rectangular processor, but with the STe and Mega STe there’s that square PLCC socket which makes it impossible/tricky to use the same interface..."

Mark Bedingfield tells Hallvard:

"I have been meaning to put some effort into building a VME ide controller. Just haven’t quite got round to it yet:-(Should not be too hard from what I can see. "

Fred Pecort jumps in and adds:

"I am currently working on an internal IDE + RAM expansion card for the Mega STE.

The good news is that it showed to work pretty well and I could drop my loud SCSI drives and use fast IDE ones.

The bad news is that my card seats in place of the PLCC cpu thanks to a quite expensive test socket. I am afraid that this might not be very reliable on the long term. It is also not completely finished since I only support the blitter at 8MHz or 16 Mhz without blitter nor cache.

Maybe some of you could share their experience they had with the PACK acceleration board or the IDE adapter from Mario Becroft and tell me how stable this was."

’Coda’ tells Fred:

"Well if its a DIY job that you want, I think all the signals that are normally taken off the CPU can be found on the GLUE/MMU."

Well folks, that’s it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Evil Dead Sequel This Summer!
New Harry Potter Coming!
Baseball Season!
And much more!

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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Evil Dead Regeneration Coming This Summer

THQ Inc. announced Evil Dead Regeneration for the Xbox video game system from Microsoft and the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system and Windows. The game explores a "what if..." continuation from Evil Dead 2, one of the most unhinged films from famed director Sam Raimi. Voiced by Bruce Campbell, players will control Ash, the reluctant hero of the series, as they’re thrown into a masquerade of evil events, equipped with the latest in prosthetic fashion. Developed by THQ studio Cranky Pants Games, Evil Dead Regeneration is scheduled to release this summer.

"I’ve come to understand that there is only one person in this world fit for this kind of work," said Ash, part-time S-Mart manager, full-time fox. "And that’s me. Not because of my knack to get things right, most of the time, but because I can slice and dice evil better than a knife sold on any late-night infomercial. Maybe it’s partially to the fact that I’ve replaced one of my hands with a chainsaw, but I digress."

Evil Dead Regeneration follows Ash, the lone survivor of a camp discovering the Necronomicon - the wholly evil book of the dead. Thought to have murdered his companions, Ash is arrested, convicted of the crime, and sentenced to Sunny Meadows, an institute for the criminally insane, but not for long. Ash’s peaceful stay is about to end - thanks to the perverted experiments of his very own psychiatrist, Dr. Reinhard. Hell-bent on using science to harness the Necronomicon’s powers, the mad doctor unleashes the book’s all-powerful Evil on the world - releasing a new slew of Deadites, monsters and spirits, twisting reality into a hellish strudel and leaving

mankind with that not-so-fresh apocalyptic feeling.

"It’s our goal to create the spiritual successor of Evil Dead 2, one of the seminal action films ever, in pop-culture," said David Bollesen, general manager, Cranky Pants Games. "Having Bruce Campbell on board, providing creative direction and embracing new ideas we’ve injected into their universe is critical, and their enthusiasm continues to drive us to deliver the ultimate Evil Dead experience."

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire Announced

Electronic Arts and Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment are pleased to announce the Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire videogame, scheduled for a November 2005 release in conjunction with the Warner Bros. Pictures film based on J.K. Rowling’s fourth book. In the game, players experience the thrilling moments of the movie and put their magic to the ultimate test in cooperative play with up to two friends.

"Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire is the fifth Harry Potter videogame we have created, and we are incredibly excited with the fresh innovations that the team has brought to the game," said Harvey Elliott, Executive Producer at EAUK. "With high anticipation for the film and our strong relationship with Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment, we have been able to develop a game that complements the film in this exciting addition to the Harry Potter franchise."

"Working with EA, we look forward to offering players a highly developed Harry Potter game with Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire," said Jason Hall, Senior Vice President for Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment. "The game will possess the extremely creative aspects of the Harry Potter world captured in both the film and the book, giving fans a complete interactive experience."

In Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, Harry is mysteriously selected as the fourth competitor in the dangerous Triwizard Tournament. Each contestant in this international competition must confront a fire-breathing dragon, rescue friends from the icy depths of the Black Lake, and navigate the twisting mysteries of a vast, dangerous maze. Players will experience all the thrills of the movie - from the Quidditch World Cup campsite to a heart-stopping duel with Lord Voldemort himself!

Harry, Ron, and Hermione are all playable characters, modeled after their big-screen counterparts. In this game, an all-new spell-casting system allows players to feel the magic for the first time as the controller shakes and reacts with every flick of the wand. Players can also team up with friends in co-operative play to combine their magic and produce more powerful spells than ever before!

Under development by EA’s UK Studio, the team behind the worldwide success of the Harry Potter library of games, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire is scheduled for release for the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system, PSP handheld entertainment system, Xbox video game system from Microsoft, Nintendo GameCube, Nintendo DS, Game Boy Advance, and Windows PC.

Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict Ships

Midway Games Inc., a leading developer and publisher of interactive entertainment software, announced today that Unreal Championship 2, the latest entry in the long established Unreal franchise and the sequel to Unreal Championship (2002), has shipped for the Xbox video game system from Microsoft.

Midway, along with the millions of people involved in the Unreal community around the world, is extremely excited about the release of Unreal Championship 2," said Steve Allison, chief marketing officer, Midway. "Our recently formed relationship with Epic Games, Inc. is one that we feel extremely thrilled about, both for Unreal Championship 2 and for future Unreal products, and we are confident that gamers will be extremely enthusiastic about our first title together. Unreal Championship 2 has been given the time over its development process to be refined to its core and, as we hope people will soon see, the outcome is one of the best-looking Xbox games on the market and one of, if not the greatest Xbox Live title ever."

"Getting a new game into consumers' hands is always an exciting time for us." said Mark Rein, Vice President, Epic Games. "This one is especially exciting because the UC2 team was able to incorporate third-person play and melee combat, which are new features to the Unreal series, as well as a thoroughly enjoyable and challenging single player storyline. We've had some really fantastic review scores including Game Informer's 9.5 out of 10, Maxim's 5 stars out of 5 and Official Xbox Magazine's 9.3 out of 10. We think gamers will be equally enchanted with this fresh approach to the shooter genre."

Unreal Championship 2 brings an entirely new level of intensity to the series as gamers are blessed with superhuman agilities that arm them for battle against deadly characters or readies them for hand-to-hand melee combat. Taking the battle online and around the world, Unreal Championship 2 pits players against each other in an eight-person Xbox Live multiplayer challenge where only the strong survive. Built from the ground up for the Xbox, Unreal Championship 2 features new gameplay elements, including a deep melee combat system that seamlessly blends in with the ranged weapon combat the series is known for, the option of first or third-person point of views, a full story-driven single-player mode, dozens of all new maps, new game modes and an arsenal of new weaponry. Additional information can be obtained through the Unreal Championship 2 web site at http://www.unrealchampionship2.com .

'MLB 2K5' Hits a Home Run

If the return of major league baseball hasn't already satisfied your hardball fix, three new video games may offer some help.

All three titles - "Major League Baseball 2K5," "MLB 2006" and "MVP 2005" - pack in a tremendous amount of detail and succeed in bringing a field of dreams to your living room.

"MLB 2K5" ($20, E-rated, PlayStation 2 and Xbox) by Take-Two Interactive takes the 2K series a step forward with beautifully rendered stadiums and the most outstanding play-by-play of any sports game to date. Fantastic use

of ESPN’s graphic overlays, pitch-by-pitch replays, and K-Zone analysis make up part of "MLB 2K5"’s slick presentation package.

ESPN’s Jon Miller and Joe Morgan return with play-by-play and color analyst duties. The amount of variety and depth of analysis is unmatched and will have you grinning several times a game.

Graphically, "MLB 2K5" is a mixed bag. The stadiums are gorgeous and accurately represented with detail and vibrant color.

And while the player’s faces are lifelike, the animations are seriously lacking. Players appear stiff and awkward, especially in the field. Poor ball physics and a lack of hit variety also detract from the overall package.

The stadiums and presentation in EA Sports’ "MVP 2005" ($30, E-rated, PS2, GameCube, Xbox and PC) are drab compared to "MLB 2K5."

The commentators for "MVP 2005" are laughably bad, but no other baseball game offers as many eye-popping animations. As a result, its game play is unparalleled. It just feels right in every way.

Pitching is largely unchanged from the previous version - a good thing. Hitting has been refined slightly with the added ability to move your player in the batter’s box.

Fielding in "MVP 2005" is an absolute joy. The large variety of animations in the infield keep games fresh and exciting.

A "Batter’s Eye" feature assigns different hues to the ball just before the pitcher throws, with each color corresponding to a different pitch type. I found it to be a gimmick sure to annoy baseball purists, and fortunately I was able to turn it off.

EA’s new Owner mode is far superior to franchise modes in other baseball games. The option to build stadiums with funds generated from media contracts, ticket sales, concession sales and merchandise sales is a brilliant stroke that really puts you in the driver’s seat of a major league franchise.

As owner, you can hand pick the type of ball park and fill it with a high-tech scoreboard, merchants, concession stands, parks, attractions - and hopefully people. Building a modern, fan-friendly facility and winning games on the field is a recipe for financial success.

This year’s most pleasant surprise, however, is 989’s reinvented "MLB 2006," a $40, E-rated PS2 exclusive.

The pitching and hitting interfaces in "MLB 2006" have been improved. It emulates MVP’s accuracy meter with a "Release Point Pitching and Pitcher Confidence Meter."

The pitching upgrades are balanced nicely with a pitch guessing system. Guessing pitches correctly alerts the batter of pitch locations in advance, much like when you hang a breaking ball in "MVP 2005."

But where "MLB 2006" stands out from the pack is in its new Career Mode. Like a role-playing game, you play from the player’s perspective, controlling their destiny from the minor leagues to (hopefully) a Hall of Fame career in the majors.

Interactions with the manager and teammates directly affect team morale. You can complain about playing time, demand trades, negotiate higher contracts or even conduct exclusive media interviews.

All three games offer online play. "MLB 2K5" rules the roost with online leagues and splendid Web site support.

But in this battle of sluggers, "MVP 2005" beats some stiff competition by offering the most authentic and immersive baseball experience this year for just $30.

Four out of four stars for "MVP 2005," three out of four for both "MLB 2006" and "MLB 2K5."

Namco Gets Video-Game Rights to ’Peanuts’ Comic Strip

Video game publisher Namco Hometek, the U.S. division of Japan’s Namco Ltd., on Wednesday said it acquired the rights to the legendary comic strip "Peanuts," featuring the lovable beagle Snoopy and his harried owner Charlie Brown.

Namco said the rights, which they got from United Media, the company that licenses and syndicates "Peanuts," extend to all current and future game platforms through 2009. The company did not say what kinds of games it would make with the license.

Though original versions of "Peanuts" ended with creator Charles M. Schulz’s retirement and subsequent death, old strips continue to run in more than 2,400 newspapers worldwide.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

IRS Flaws Expose Taxpayers to Snooping, Study Finds

Computer-security flaws at the U.S. tax-collection agency expose millions of taxpayers to potential identity theft or illegal police snooping, according to a congressional report released on Monday.

The Internal Revenue Service also is unlikely to know if outsiders are browsing through citizens’ tax returns, because it doesn’t effectively police its computer systems for unauthorized use, the Government Accountability Office found.

The report was released three days after the deadline for filing personal income-tax returns, and at a time when concerns about identity theft and

computer security are running high.

"This lack of systems security at the IRS is completely unacceptable and needs to be corrected immediately," said House of Representatives Judiciary Chairman James Sensenbrenner, a Wisconsin Republican.

The IRS promised to fix any problems and find out if tax returns had been exposed to outsiders.

The IRS over the past several years has taken steps to protect the information it collects, the report found. The agency has fixed 32 of the 53 problems that turned up in a 2002 review, the GAO said.

But the GAO found 39 new security problems on top of the 21 that remain unfixed.

Along with $2 trillion in tax receipts, the IRS also collects information on money laundering and other possible financial crimes for the government’s financial-intelligence office.

But barriers between tax returns and money-laundering reports don’t exist, the GAO found. Thus a police officer checking up on money-laundering reports can also read personal tax returns, in violation of federal law.

In all, 7,500 IRS employees, law enforcers and outside contractors can access and modify tax returns and financial-crime reports, the GAO found.

A master list of passwords and user names is also widely available, the report said.

"Increased risk exists that unauthorized users could ... claim a user identity and then use that identity to gain access to sensitive taxpayer or Bank Secrecy Act data," the report said.

Identity thieves have used stolen passwords to gain access to nearly half a million profiles of U.S. citizens maintained by data brokers ChoicePoint Inc. and LexisNexis, a division of Reed Elsevier .

In a letter dated April 14, a Treasury Department official said many of the security holes portrayed in the report have been fixed and others should be completed by October.

The agency will figure out whether tax returns and financial-crime information have been inappropriately disclosed, Acting Deputy Treasury Secretary Arnold Havens said.

Michigan Rep. John Conyers, a Democrat, said the Judiciary Committee will consider whether additional measures are needed to strengthen computer security.

Lawmakers Introduce Bill to Extend Internet Tax Ban

Three U.S. lawmakers on Tuesday introduced a bill that would permanently extend a ban on Internet-only taxes, including taxes on Internet access.

The legislation would ban three types of taxes that single out the Internet: taxes on Internet access, multiple taxation by two or more states

of a product or service bought over the Internet, and taxes that treat Internet purchases differently from other types of sales.

"It’s important that we take a stand right here and now to make sure that we say that the United States of America and the Internet will be a no-tax zone, now and forever," said Senator George Allen, a Virginia Republican and one of the bill’s sponsors. Senators Ron Wyden, an Oregon Democrat, and Representative Christopher Cox (news, bio, voting record), a California Republican, co-sponsored the bill.

The bill would extend a current Internet tax moratorium that is due to expire in 2007.

Supporters of the Internet Tax Non-Discrimination Act in 2004 attempted to permanently ban what supporters call "discriminatory" Internet taxes, but a group of U.S. senators held up the bill because of concerns that it would stop states from taxing forms of telecommunications transmitted by Internet Protocol, as more telecom providers move traffic to voice over IP. In a compromise, the Senate approved a version of the bill that extended a five-year ban against Internet-only taxes levied by states and local governments.

Allen said this bill does not address the issue of VoIP taxation: "That will be a separate battle." Also, an existing grandfather-clause compromise that allows some current state Internet taxes to expire in 2005 and others in 2007 would remain in place.

Supporters of the tax ban say access and other Internet taxes would slow U.S. adoption of broadband services, potentially slowing the U.S. economy. "The Internet Tax Freedom law has created a level playing field, stopping unfair and discriminatory tax schemes that would wall off the Internet to many consumers and make e-commerce impossible for online business owners," Wyden said in a statement. "Internet users and entrepreneurs who breathed a sigh of relief at this law’s extension should have the security of knowing its protections will never go away."

Allen also has introduced another bill to prevent Congress from extending a long-standing telecommunications tax to Internet access. In January, Congress’s Joint Committee on Taxation suggested an expansion of a 3 percent federal excise tax on telecommunications to Internet traffic, including e-mail and data services.

AOL Launches Anti-Phishing Campaign

America Online is adding new weapons to its arsenal for fighting Internet phishing attacks with the introduction of a 24/7 Web site monitoring service and an effort to improve the ability to identify and block phishing operations.

In this latest security campaign, AOL joined forces with online security firm Cyota to evaluate potential phishing sites based on member feedback through a "Report Spam" button, among other techniques.

Cyota’s list of bogus sites is combined with a similar list compiled by AOL to create a master directory of suspicious sites.

When a potential phishing site is pinpointed, AOL will block access to the

site through the AOL client and issue a warning to members who attempt to visit that location.

In addition, AOL is working to block access to fraudulent Web sites that imitate legitimate companies like banks, credit card issuers, online auctions and online payment facilitators.

"This is a round-the-clock swat team that will identify and block access to phishing sites even before a user logs on," said AOL spokesman Andrew Weinstein.

Phishing is a serious problem, he said, because even savvy Internet users can be duped into giving up passwords and other sensitive information, and added that attacks are becoming increasingly sophisticated.

Indeed, the Anti-Phishing Working Group (APWG) recently released a report noting that the number of phishing e-mails increased by 42 percent in January.

According to the watchdog organization, some 13,000 new and unique phishing e-mails were reported during that month, putting the number of attacks at their highest level ever.

The group also noted that the number of unique phishing Web sites has increased from 1,740 in October to 2,560 in January, representing a 47 percent rise.

To help stem the problem, Microsoft, eBay and Visa International recently joined the Phish Report Network, an anti-phishing aggregation service introduced by endpoint security firm WholeSecurity.

The initiative allows a company that has been subject to a phishing attack to report suspect and fraudulent Web sites immediately to a central database. WholeSecurity will be tasked with maintaining the database and disseminating the information.

In addition to its latest efforts, AOL offers a range of tools and strategies to help protect members from phishing scams, Weinstein said.

They include AOL PassCode, which uses a token to continuously change the code required to access an account, Money Alerts that notify members of unusual activity on registered bank accounts or credit cards, and Account Lockdowns that block access and alert the member to confirm their identity and help them secure their account.

Sober Worm Given New Life

A classic of the virus and worm world, Sober, has been given new life with a variant that is spreading through e-mail with the subject line, "I’ve got your e-mail on my account."

Security firms are issuing warnings about the worm, called either Sober.M or Sober.N, depending on the firm.

The worm uses a standard technique called harvesting, which reports active e-mail addresses back to the worm author, who might then be selling the address to spammers.

The e-mail message itself appears in German or English, with the latter formatted to sound like a non-English speaker trying to correct an e-mail forwarding error.

"Someone is sending your private e-mails on my address," the message reads. "It’s probably an e-mail provider error! At time, I’ve got over 10 mails on my account, but the recipient are you."

The supposed "good Samaritan" indicates that he or she has copied all the text from the misdirected messages into a Windows text editor and put them in a compressed file.

The attachment is called "your_text.zip." The Sober worm is in the attachment, and activates upon download.

The virus writer’s use of poor English is likely a tactic to persuade recipients that the sender is simply a good Internet citizen trying to correct an e-mail delivery mistake, said Graham Cluley, senior technology consultant at security firm Sophos.

"Because of the way it’s worded, and the apology for not speaking better English, people might think it’s legitimate," he noted.

Also, users might be fooled because the file is not the type commonly associated with worms, such as an .exe attachment, Cluley added.

Like viruses that cause physical illness, online worms and viruses do not die out, Cluley said.

"The code for many threats is known, so virus writers often create variants based on things that have worked in the past," he added.

Variants might include quirky icons, slightly different delivery methods, or enticing messages to fool users.

"Basically, they’ll just keep trying various tactics and changing the code until they get as many users to download the infected files as they can," Cluley said.

Microsoft Sued Over JPEG Patent

Forgent Networks has added Microsoft to the list of companies it has sued alleging infringement of a patent for a data compression technique it claims is used in the JPEG digital image standard.

The lawsuit, filed Thursday in U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas, comes after Forgent was unable to negotiate a licensing agreement with the Redmond, Washington-based software maker, says Michael Noonan, director of investor relations at Forgent.

"We want them to pay a reasonable royalty rate for the technology they are using," Noonan says. "If a company uses JPEG, they are using our patents."

In an apparent preemptive strike, Microsoft last Friday sued Forgent subsidiary Compression Labs in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California in San Francisco. In the suit, Microsoft asked the

court to declare that it is not infringing and invalidate the patent in question, Forgent says in a statement.

Forgent sued 31 companies in April 2004 and several other companies after that. The company has reached licensing agreements with more than 35 companies and received more than $100 million in licensing revenue to this point, it says. Licensees include Sony, Adobe Systems, Macromedia, and Onkyo, Noonan says.

Companies that have been sued include Apple Computer, Dell, Eastman Kodak, Hewlett-Packard, IBM, and Xerox.

JPEG (Joint Photographic Experts Group) files are used by a wide variety of hardware and software products to display digital images. The procedure used to compress digital images in order to create a JPEG file infringes on Forgent’s patent for a method of digital image compression, the Austin, Texas, company alleges.

In 2002, Forgent announced it held this patent and said it planned to seek licensing agreements from any company that sells products that compress or store JPEG images.

Apple Protested Over E-Waste

Demonstrators picketed Apple Computer’s annual meeting, criticizing the company for being environmentally insensitive in its waste disposal policies and manufacturing.

Company chief executive Steve Jobs responded by vehemently disputing the allegations.

The protest was organized by the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, which has been critical of Apple in past months, accusing the computer maker of using toxic parts in its products and showing indifference toward recycling old monitors and computer equipment.

About a dozen members of the group protested at the company’s Cupertino headquarters, with protestors dressed as iPods leaping into trash cans, and holding signs with messages like "From iPod to iWaste."

The same coalition staged a protest at the Macworld trade show in January as well.

During the annual meeting, a representative of Green Century Funds asked Jobs directly if he had a response for the protestors, according to news reports.

In reply, Jobs pointed out that Apple was the first computer maker to offer a recycling program. In the past, Apple has been criticized for less aggressive recycling tactics compared to Dell and Hewlett-Packard.

Jobs noted that Apple’s recycling program was launched in 2001, and since then has recycled more than 1,500 tons of electronics.

In his response, Jobs was especially emphatic in defending the iPod. The coalition has called the digital music player a "time bomb for our health and environment," because of toxic metals it contains.

Jobs admitted that iPods contain a small amount of lead, but said the company is working to phase out its use, and that calling it a time bomb is "inexcusable."

The protest at Apple might be replicated at many other companies in the future, given the amount of e-waste that is hitting landfills.

State and federal governmental agencies have tried to address the problem through legislation already, said Stampp Corbin, chief executive of Columbus, Ohio-based equipment refurbishment firm RetroBox.

"There are over 50 pieces of legislation that deal with e-waste, and it's still a problem," he said. "As you can imagine, having that many regulations makes disposal into a complex issue."

Because of this, more companies are investigating better disposal and refurbishment, noted Corbin, with environmental concerns and security as the two main drivers. "No one wants the landfills to be piled up with equipment," he said.

Lawsuit Claims AOL Worker Seduced Teen

America Online markets itself as a safe place for children, with parent-friendly features and a force of employees who monitor kids' chat rooms and watch out for adults prowling for youngsters.

But is AOL doing enough to monitor the monitors?

That question is central to a lawsuit filed by a California teenager who claims a chat-room monitor tried to seduce her online.

The employee allegedly used his position to proposition the girl over two years, during which they exchanged graphic images, e-mails and phone calls - exactly the kind of scenario the man was hired to prevent.

AOL fired the man, Matthew D. Wright, and referred the case to the FBI and other law enforcement agencies, none of which pursued criminal charges. Attempts to locate Wright, listed in the lawsuit as a resident of Oklahoma, were unsuccessful.

The girl's lawsuit is the first such claim made against an employee at AOL or any other major Internet service provider, according to online child safety organizations and law enforcement agencies. It alleges negligence and false advertising and seeks at least $25,000 from Wright, AOL and its parent, Time Warner Inc.

AOL says it closely screens its chat-room monitors and acted quickly in this case.

Still, the company is being forced to defend itself over a service it pioneered in the mid-1990s and which remains a selling point to keep its millions of subscribers from jumping to other Internet service providers.

"This case isn't so much are they properly monitoring chat rooms for kids; this is more a question of what are they doing to monitor the qualities and qualifications of the people they're hiring," said Parry Aftab, an Internet

lawyer in New Jersey who runs online safety workshops for parents and children.

Claims of online abuse by an employee are rare, said Aftab, who has heard of no more than a dozen against chat-room monitors or moderators.

Chat-room monitors are cyberspace’s lifeguards. They typically watch over the messages that participants post, and warn users when they cross the line with offensive or otherwise prohibited remarks. They can delete offending remarks, kick violators out of the chat room, even ban them from returning.

AOL is a rarity - a major service provider that offers its own chat service, as well as one of the few online companies that have paid, full-time employees monitoring some chat rooms. The company markets its KOL, or Kids Online, chat area as a safer online experience.

It was inside one kids-only chat room where Wright, then 23, first contacted the then-15-year-old girl, who was living in Kern County, according to the lawsuit. She is now 19 and living in Los Angeles.

They grew close, according to the lawsuit, the girl gradually confiding in him about her parents’ divorce and her troubles making friends. She and Wright were preparing to meet on her 17th birthday and have sex, the lawsuit said, when one of the monitor’s co-workers became suspicious and blew the whistle.

AOL spokesman Nicholas Graham said monitors undergo rigorous screening, including drug testing and background checks, and receive specialized training for the area and age group they will be monitoring.

"That monitoring is itself actively monitored and scrutinized by internal compliance and investigation teams with close, long-standing working relationships with both law enforcement and children’s safety advocacy groups," Graham said. "The bottom line is, AOL’s self-policing and self-monitoring efforts worked."

Graham would not say how many full-time chat-room monitors AOL has, or whether the company has tightened its procedures because of the case.

But if AOL’s oversight was effective, Wright would have been caught well before he arranged to meet the girl, said her attorney, Olivier Taillieu.

"You can’t let something like this go on for two years or a year and a half," Taillieu said. "You can’t have the lifeguard jump in the pool and drown one of the kids."

This Mouse Won’t Hunt

Lawmakers from Augusta to Sacramento are locking and loading to shoot down a Web site that purports to let people hunt big game online. This topic has been heating up for more than a month after Texas-based Live-Shot.com opened for business, and is finally gaining front-burner status after a prominent Republican congressman introduced a bill to outlaw Internet hunting nationwide.

Explaining his bill, Rep. Tom Davis (R-Va.) said last week that "fair chase

is a basic element of hunting. You have to be there, in the field, not sitting behind a computer screen."

Davis's views are shared across the country and across the partisan aisle. California State Sen. Debra Bowen (D) told Reuters that "Pay-per-view hunting doesn't meet any definition of 'sporting' that I've ever heard because there's nothing 'sporting' about sitting at your computer in your pajamas, using your mouse to shoot at hogs or antelope or any other animal that's halfway across the country."

But hold your fire, at least for a moment. People who don't hunt sometimes imagine all hunters as backwoods bubbas or weekend warriors from the city who can't shoot straight. In this situation, however, the poster-boy for the preservation of Live-Shot.com is Dale Hagberg, a 38-year-old quadriplegic who couldn't lift a rifle, let alone engage in "fair chase" in the field.

Hagberg, as the Los Angeles Times noted, worked a computer mouse with his mouth and tongue on Saturday, April 9, to shoot at an antelope on a game reserve near Boeme, Texas, while lying in bed in Ligonier, a town in northeastern Indiana.

Fort Worth Star-Telegram reporter Jay Root provided more details of how Live-Shot.com works: "The system is pretty simple. The remote hunter can zoom in and out of the target area by operating remote cameras and has a control panel with four arrows in a circle and a 'fire' button in the middle. With a few mouse clicks, the hunter can swivel and fire a Remington Model 742 .30-'06 mounted on a pan-tilt motor," Root reported. Of course, he noted, "there has to be something to fire at ... For several hours in the morning and evening Saturday, Lockwood scoured a small swath of a ranch near Guadalupe River State Park for any sign of the black buck that Hagberg paid $1,300 for. If [Hagberg] doesn't shoot the animal before the end of August, when his Texas hunting license expires, Lockwood said, he'll refund the money."

Dale plans to try again on Saturday, April 30, Dale's father Robert Hagberg told me in an interview this morning.

If 14 states and a flock of furious animal rights activists have their way, however, Hagberg and other would-be Internet hunters will be banished to video-game territory. Virginia already has banned online hunting, as has Tennessee. Similar efforts are afoot in Maine, California and Texas.

Lawmakers opposed to sites like Live-Shot.com have plenty of allies. UKPets.co.uk reported that Humane Society President Wayne Pacelle is asking Internet service providers to block access to the site, while the Los Angeles Times quotes Texas Wildlife Association Executive Vice President Kirby L. Brown as saying, "It's not hunting... It falls off of the end of the ethical chart."

The L.A. Times presented an interesting point of view from Dale Jamieson, an environmental studies and philosophy professor at New York University. He said that Live-Shot is "an understandable, if disturbing, extension of a computer society that produces games like 'Grand Theft Auto.' Jamieson: "If you look at this as being kind of a continuum or slippery slope ... you have people who enjoy the act of killing and destruction in video games, you have people who enjoy killing animals over the Internet. But of course the next step in this is that people start killing people over the Internet. That's the worry."

That seems a bit far-fetched. Moving from Internet game-hunting to real-life versions of "The Most Dangerous Game" seems like a slope that's more slippery than Rick Santorum's views about where homosexuality will lead our society.

Shooting animals through an Internet connection might seem distasteful to those who oppose hunting on moral grounds to begin with, but using a broadband connection to bag game isn't any better or worse than doing it in person. I can't say whether I think that Dale Hagberg should have a right to hunt despite being paralyzed - that will be a matter for Rep. Davis and 14 statehouses to deal with.

Microsoft Launches New Ad Campaign for Windows

Microsoft Corp. launched a 15-month advertising campaign on Monday to boost sales of the Windows XP operating system, while the world's largest software maker prepares its next version of Windows, code-named Longhorn.

Redmond, Washington-based Microsoft declined to say how much it would spend on the global television, print and online marketing effort, or how the duration of the campaign might reflect the delivery schedule of Longhorn.

Advertising trade report Adweek estimated the cost of the campaign at about $100 million, including production of more than 50 versions of television commercials for 11 countries. Advertising agency McCann Erickson, part of Interpublic Group of Cos. Inc, created the campaign.

Scott Lennard, director of advertising for Microsoft's consumer marketing group, said that Microsoft wanted people to "rediscover" Windows XP, currently its flagship operating system, which runs on more than nine out of 10 personal computers.

The massive ad campaign comes three years after the debut of Windows XP and urges people to use the programs to pursue any of more than a dozen different interests, including music, science, art and sports. In the main print ads, a window is displayed over a person's heart, with various images connected to the themes flowing out of the window.

Microsoft's renewed advertising effort also comes as Apple Computer Inc. prepares to ship the latest operating system for its Macintosh PC later this month.

Apple's software, which it calls "Mac OS X Tiger," is being described by the Cupertino, California-based company as a feature-rich operating system that already delivers many of the features promised by Longhorn.

Microsoft is expected to talk about Longhorn in greater detail next week at its annual hardware and engineering conference in Seattle. Microsoft is planning to release a preliminary test, or beta, version of Longhorn this summer.

Opera Software Upgrades Hacker Defenses

Better security and the automatic scaling of Web pages to fit screens of

any width are among the features included with a new browser released by Opera Software ASA on Tuesday.

In version 8 of Opera, a security information field automatically starts when a user visits a secure Web site, indicating the level of security on a scale of one to three and showing who owns the security certificate.

This way, surfers can evaluate the trustworthiness of banking and shopping Web sites and minimize the risk of phishing attacks, in which scammers send e-mail tricking recipients into revealing credit card numbers and other sensitive personal information.

The new browser version can be downloaded for free with advertising for the Windows and Linux operating systems. An ad-free version costs $39. Opera also released a test version, or "beta," for Mac OS computers.

Opera 8 rearranges Web pages as necessary so Web surfers can view them within narrower windows without having to slide a horizontal tab. This feature is particularly useful for the small screens of mobile phones; Opera sees such devices as a growth potential.

The browser also allows voice commands to the computer and having the machine read pages aloud, though the feature is only available in English and for the Windows 2000 and XP operating systems.

Opera commands less than 0.2 percent of the Windows market, behind the industry leading Internet Explorer from Microsoft Corp. and various browsers based on the Mozilla Foundation’s open-source code, according to tracking by WebSideStory.

Google Sues for Halt of Froogles.com Domain

The trademark dispute between search giant Google and shopping site Froogles.com escalated recently, as Google filed suit in federal court to halt use of the Froogles.com domain.

In an April 8 filing with the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York, Google Inc. asserts that Froogles and Froogles.com, a Web site that links to Web-based shopping deals, infringe on the Google trademark and dilute the value of the Google name.

"Protecting the Google brand is a top priority for us," Steve Langdon, a spokesman for Mountain View, Calif.-based Google, said in an e-mail. "This includes seeking trademark registration protection for Google and related brands, like Froogle, as well as taking action against infringers."

The company’s legal wrangling with Richard Wolfe, the proprietor of Holtsville, N.Y.-based Froogles.com, began when Google applied to register the name Froogle with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office in 2002. Wolfe filed an objection to that registration based on his own use of Froogles.com, which he also registered for a trademark. According to Wolfe’s lawyer, he also demanded that Google stop using the Froogle name.

Google in May 2004 offered to allow Wolfe to continue using the Froogles.com site if he withdrew his complaint. His lawyer, Stephen Humphrey, said Wolfe refused the offer and Google filed a complaint with ICANN (the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers), which

rejected Google's claim that Froogles.com was "confusingly similar" to Google.

"The reason given for this suit is that Froogles.com infringes the mark Google," said Humphrey, Wolfe's lawyer in Washington, D.C. "That's the same issue that was decided by the ICANN panel."

The decision on Google's trademark application for Froogle is still pending, but the suit this month also asks the court to "direct the Patent and Trademark Office to dismiss Wolfe's opposition proceeding regarding our Froogle trademark," Google's Langdon said.

"It's reasonable to suspect in filing the lawsuit in New York and suspending the trademark opposition is to avoid a decision from the trademark office," Humphrey said. A judgment in Wolfe's favor in the trademark office would result in Froogle not being registered.

Wolfe's position is that he registered the Froogles.com domain in December 2000 and "began planning" a shopping-based service at that time. He launched a Web site in March 2001 and was operating that shopping Web site prior to Froogle, which Google introduced in December 2002. They also argue that Froogles.com is not confused with Google. Humphrey said Google had no issues with Froogles.com until Wolfe filed the trademark opposition.

Humphrey called many of the claims in Google's suit "preposterous," such as those of creating unfair competition, steering customers away and deceiving the public, and he said the argument has a David-versus-Goliath nature.

"He's a sole proprietor operating this from his home, and they may be trying to put additional pressure on Richard Wolfe to close down his business or abandon his efforts," Humphrey said.

Even if Wolfe keeps his site operational through the dispute, Google ultimately wants the courts to close him down.

"Google is seeking a court order prohibiting Mr. Wolfe from using Froogles, Froogles.com, or any mark or domain name similar to Google," Langdon said.

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